



Ruchika Tulshyan
www.CandourGlobal.com
connect@rtulshyan.com

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND WOMEN OF COLOR IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN AMERICAN WORKPLACES: EXAMINATION AND SOLUTIONS

Statement of
Ruchika Tulshyan, M.S.
Founder, Candour, Diversity and Inclusion Strategist & Author

before the

**Subcommittee on Diversity and Inclusion
Financial Services Committee,
United States House of Representatives**

**Promoting Inclusion: Examining the Need for Diversity Practices for
America's Changing Workforce**

October 17, 2019



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Good afternoon. A heartfelt thank you to Chair Beatty and members of the committee for inviting me to talk about this important issue of promoting inclusion in the workplace.

I come here representing my views, and mine alone, as an immigrant woman of color and a mother.

I'd like to focus on four key areas today where women, and I'm centering on women of color in my testimony, face barriers to retention and advancement at work, with data-backed proposed solutions.

Multiple studies show women are having significantly more negative experiences in American workforces today compared with their male peers. We are forced to navigate workplaces designed without us in mind, despite ample evidence highlighting why harnessing diversity in the workplace is key to American competitiveness, prosperity and innovation.

The experience of women of color in American workplaces

For women of color, the situation is dire. White women hold 19% of C-Suite positions but women of color only hold 4%. Research finds women of color face harmful stereotypes about our professional competence, leadership ability and behavior.

In addition, by 2060 the majority of all women in the United States will be women of color. A *Washington Post* headline last month stated: "For the first time, most new working-age hires in the U.S. are people of color." We simply cannot turn away from designing equitable workforces; the demographics are changing in front of our very eyes.

Diversity practices to support working mothers in America

The first barrier is the challenge of working motherhood. It is a travesty that 1 in 4 American women go back to work within 10 days of giving birth. We are the only developed country in the world that doesn't guarantee paid maternity leave – so too many women have to make the heartbreaking choice between a paycheck and giving birth or taking care of a sick child. At work, we face the "motherhood penalty," where we are penalized by lower pay, job opportunities and even perceived competence for having children. Guess what men receive when they become dads? A fatherhood bonus. No wonder 43% of working mothers leave corporate America!

One research-backed solution is to federally mandate paid *family* leave. Not only for when a woman gives birth, but also, to avail of when a family member is sick. Offer it to mothers and fathers, so not only women are responsible for childcare. By the way, a study found businesses save \$19 billion annually by retaining female employees when



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they offer fully-paid 16-weeks maternity leave. *It's literally a win-win for businesses, families and our society.*

Diversity practices to sponsor women at work in America

Second, women need sponsors. We do not need more mentors; in fact research shows we have many more casual mentors at work than men. Sponsorship means having more leaders personally invested in our success, who offer us the top jobs, the high-visibility projects and the insider knowledge that men often get informal access to on the golf course or dinners women aren't invited to. Early pilots of sponsorship programs in some innovative companies have yielded positive results in the advancement of high-potential women.

Diversity practices to distribute office housework equitably to advance women

Third, we need office housework to be distributed equitably. Office housework refers to the unglamorous work – the meeting notes, ordering lunches, mentoring interns etc. that does not get recognized or lead to promotion. Office housework is disproportionately assigned to women and people of color. One study found women do 30% more of it than white men. We must ensure women don't get saddled with these tasks, because they have a real and recognizable impact on their career advancement. So in short: Equitably distribute office housework.

Diversity practices to champion women's advancement at work

Fourth, and most importantly, leaders must address their own personal biases and also actively champion equity. In writing my book, I found that across industry, organization size and geography, companies that exhibited more gender equality than their peers, all had only one trait in common – leadership buy-in for diversity. We must ensure leaders – of corporations and governments alike - understand the unique barriers faced by professional women and people of color, and work actively to dismantle them. We need advocacy efforts backed by well-resourced chief diversity offices. Those in positions of power must actively prioritize inclusion, so women can safely report harassment or bias without retaliation.

Members of Congress, there's no issue we are facing today that doesn't impact underrepresented communities, especially more acutely – climate change, immigration, violence, poverty, access to health care...the list goes on and you are all well-familiar with them. What type of innovative solutions could we design if more women, especially women of color, were in leadership roles to tackle them?

It is absolutely crucial for the future of the American democracy to prioritize championing women, especially of color, in the workplace. Thank you.